



# Washington State Department of Agriculture News Release

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## **WSDA ensures that every gallon counts**

**OLYMPIA** – With gasoline prices at record levels throughout Washington, it is critical for consumers to know that every gallon they put in their tank is true.

That job rests with the Washington State Department of Agriculture (WSDA). Inspectors for WSDA's Weights and Measures Program are on the job to insure motorists receive the amount and the quality of fuel they pay for.

"Our inspectors test thousands of meters at gas stations and check the quality of the fuel on an unannounced basis to insure consumers are getting what they pay for," said Jerry Buendel, manager of Washington's Weights and Measures Program.

The inspectors test the meters by using methods developed by the National Conference on Weights and Measures. In addition to pumping the fuel into precisely calibrated measuring containers, they inspect the dispensers to insure they are correctly calculating the charges and that the safety features are in place.

In 2003 the agency's nine inspectors tested about a third of the gasoline pumps in the state. On average they found problems with about 11 percent of the 16,000 meters tested. About two thirds of the problems are caused by improper calibration. Other problems come from mechanical problems such as leaking hoses or malfunctioning pumps.

The tolerances are very strict. The pumps must deliver within 0.5 percent of the quantity tested to pass. For example, on a 10-gallon purchase a consumer must be within 6.4 fluid ounces of the amount delivered – that's just over half the amount in a regular can of soda. The ounces can add up quickly. Statewide, based on an average consumption of 3.2 billion gallons annually, that could be as much as 1.6 million gallons of gasoline paid for but not dispensed.

When inspectors find a gas pump that is shorting the customer they order the device out of service and require that the station have the device repaired by a registered service agent before selling through that meter again. Buendel emphasized that their mission is both to protect the public and to insure fair competition among businesses.

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“In some cases we find pumps dispensing too much fuel,” Buendel said. “When that occurs we allow the station to continue using the device, but notify the business so they can have the device repaired.”

When it comes to octane levels, Washington motorists are getting what they pay for. The agency began a testing program in 1991 and found the compliance rate to be 72 percent. In 2003 compliance was at 98 percent. According to Buendel, the program serves as an effective deterrent to those attempting to sell low quality fuel to Washington consumers.

According to the American Automobile Association (AAA), self-serve, regular gasoline averaged \$2.225 across Washington as of May 17. It is the highest amount that Washington drivers have ever paid for gas and compares to the last record set in September 2003, when the same level and grade of gas sold for \$1.95 a gallon.

With the high cost of fuel motorists can take some extra steps to make sure they aren't overpaying at the pump.

- Confirm that the display is set to zero before any gasoline is pumped.
- Make sure the correct price or any discounts you qualify for are reflected in the price before you start filling your tank.
- Check the price by multiplying the number of gallons by the unit price and check your receipt.

Motorists can reduce their costs by making sure they are using the proper grade of fuel. Most cars run on regular or 87 octane fuel and don't need the higher, more expensive grades. Check your owner's manual for your vehicle's requirements.

Other cost saving tips:

- Keep your car tuned and your tires properly inflated.
- Plan your trips to minimize your drive times.
- Avoid traveling during rush hours to reduce fuel consumption patterns associated with stop and start traffic.
- Avoid jackrabbit starts
- Use your air conditioner sparingly.
- Consider alternate transportation methods such as carpooling, public transit, riding a bike or walking whenever possible.

State weights and measures inspectors are responsible for testing a wide range of scales, meters, and price scanners and for insuring products are properly labeled. In Washington there are more than 65,000 scales and meters used for commerce in the state.

Weights and Measures responds to complaints about motor fuel and can be reached at (360) 902-1857 or at [wts&measures@agr.wa.gov](mailto:wts&measures@agr.wa.gov). The cities of Seattle and Spokane have weights and measures programs as well. To contact Seattle's program call (206) 386-1298, to reach Spokane dial (509) 625-6611.

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*Editors: If you would like to accompany inspectors, please contact Jerry Buendel at (360) 902-1856.*

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